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# Leading Ideas



## Four Doors that Lead to Faith Development

By Cary S. Miller On August 3, 2011

Leading Ideas

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People arrived at church for the first Sunday of a four-week stewardship emphasis. They were surprised to see a door with a door frame in the sanctuary, as if workers had neglected to take it to its intended location. But the door was there for a purpose and would stay for each of the next four weeks. Then one additional door and frame appeared each successive Sunday. The doors served an important function. They symbolized what the church had been studying for the past twelve months. During the past year, the congregational focus had been on the “four doors” that lead to faith development. Now, for four Sundays, members were asked to make their personal commitments for the coming year or to “step through each of the four doors as God is leading you.”

“ A worthwhile relationship involves giving and receiving. The church cannot help people grow in faith if it is unwilling to ask them to engage actively in the practices that lead to spiritual growth.

### Door One: Commit to weekly participation in worship.

We worship together because corporate worship provides a different experience than worshipping alone. There is strength in numbers. That one hour a week spent in worship is an hour that is solely focused on God, our relationship with God, and on the organization that exists to carry out God’s work. The church should ask people to commit at least one hour a week to communal worship.

### Door Two: Commit to weekly participation in spiritual development.

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Christianity, like all faiths, is taught not caught. We aren't born as Christians. Even those born into and reared in Christian environments must study what it means to be a Christian and practice the faith. My son, an accomplished musician, informed me as he headed off to college that he no longer needed to go to church because he was comfortable with his understanding of God. I asked him how often he practiced his musical instrument. He said he practiced a minimum of six hours a day. Since we were on the subject of his finding and participating in a church, he got the point of my question! People cannot grow in faith if they do not devote time to fostering that growth. The church must challenge people to spend a minimum of one hour a week in personal spiritual development and provide them with appropriate resources and opportunities.

Door Three: Commit to giving time in service to others each week.

If you want to know people's priorities, look first at their calendar and then at their checkbook. Our priorities are reflected in how we spend our time. You cannot truly be a good Christian (and a good steward of the resources with which God has blessed you) without giving of your time in service to others. Once again, a good starting point is to challenge people to give a minimum of one hour a week in service to others. The church relies on such contributions of time to carry out its vital mission, as do many other worthwhile community organizations.

Door Four: Commit to contributing financially to God's work through the church.

All churches ask members and constituents to contribute financially. But few teach people how to give. Biblical stewardship is based on proportionate giving — giving in relationship to receiving. Members should be asked to commit a proportion of what they receive, after a time of prayer and discernment. Instead of asking people to make a financial commitment based on an aggregate amount, people should be asked to base their commitment on a proportion or percentage.

Articulating expectations clearly

Strong relationships are dynamic and always changing. This is true of relationships with other people, with organizations, and most especially our relationship with God. The church exists to help us grow in our relationship with God and others through Christian discipleship.

There is a reciprocal quality to strong relationships. Church members have a right to expect things of the church, and the church has a right to expect things of its members. Many churches fear that articulating clear expectations will drive people away. But this is not true! A worthwhile relationship involves giving and receiving. The church cannot help people grow in faith if it is unwilling to ask them to engage actively in the practices that lead to spiritual growth. The image of four doorways helps communicate the expectations the church has of its people in constructive and positive ways.

Measuring Progress

Anyone who works for a large organization probably goes through an annual review — a yearly assessment of how well they are performing their assigned duties and tasks. In a similar manner, the church should encourage members to appraise their spiritual progress regularly, asking:

- Are you participating in worship regularly?
- Are you experiencing ongoing spiritual growth?
- Are you putting faith into action through service to others?
- Are you giving to the church financially in proportion to what you have received?

These four “doorways” are the portals that lead to a fuller relationship with God and God's church.

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About Author

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The Rev. Cary S. “Buddy” Miller is the founder of Stewardship Consulting Services, LLC, which helps churches through capital stewardship campaigns and stewardship enhancement initiatives.

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